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ABSTRACT

A study conducted qualitative interviews with 12 newly qualified pedagogues from 3 different training colleges in 3 different locations in Denmark. The project was launched because the formerly more specialized training program was being replaced by one standard education program that would be a general education in which students would gain a general knowledge of problems attached to pedagogical work with ordinary, disabled and socially disadvantaged children, juveniles and adults, and have the potential to learn to obtain new knowledge and options when confronted with new problems at work. The organization of the new training program was decentralized. The first point of general relevance from the study was that, if a national education board leaves it to the decentralized levels to determine essential elements of the training programs, it would result in differentiation. The second point was that as a result of modernizing, newly qualified pedagogues would need increased proficiency in negotiation and administration systems. The third point was that 11 pedagogues planned to create their own special niche or a special career by incorporating personal interests such as music. In connection with the "critical/utopian" concepts of self-regulation, self-determination, and self-administration, newly qualified pedagogues may interpret them very differently according to the cultural context of the pedagogue. (Contains 10 references.) (YLB)

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1

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Katrin Hjort

# AN ENTIRELY DIFFERENT REALITY
## THE EXPERIENCE OF 12 NEWLY QUALIFIED PEDAGOGUES ON THE SUBJECT OF EDUCATION AND WORK

*When we were in college we were forever told that once we entered the real life things would be different, and by God, somehow or other it is true. At least that is my experience. Things are different from what you want them to be.*

Peter, East, Dec. 1997

*You could say that I have been in a crisis. Or perhaps rather been subjected to a culture chock or something like that. I think this happens to a lot who have just finished their training, because you begin to wonder: Well, what exactly is it that I am supposed to know? I don't know anything, really. But I think, all of a sudden you are expected to carry this huge responsibility simply because you're now a pedagogue, know what I mean.*

Anette, West, Jan. 1998

The transition between education and work was the essence of a study I carried out in 1998 as part of the research project "The Competences of Pedagogues". The research project was carried out in the period 1995 to 1998 by a group of researchers (Kirsten Weber et al) from the Adult Educational Research Group of Roskilde University in co-operation with the trade unions of the Danish pedagogues, BUPL and SL.

The reason for this project being launched was, among other things, that in Denmark the formerly more specialised training programmes for pedagogues was being replaced by one standard education programme. This new training programme is of three and a half years' duration and aims to qualify pedagogues for ordinary day-care institutions for ordinary children as well as for specialised

institutions for children, juveniles and adults with physical and mental disabilities, or institutions for socially disadvantaged children, juveniles and adults. Obviously, the students will not be able to gain an in-depth specialised knowledge of all these very different functions. The intention is that this new training programme is to be a general education in which the students through e.g. project work will gain a general knowledge of the different problems attached to pedagogical work within the public sector in Denmark, and in which they will have the possibility for acquiring the tools, or for learning to learn, so that they will be able to obtain new knowledge and new options whenever they are confronted with new problems at their work.

It is, furthermore, important to mention that the organisation of the new training programme is decentralised. Each training college has been allowed an extended degree of freedom to design their training programmes to accommodate for local wishes and needs – within the framework of national regulations. Moreover, the pedagogical places of employment that take in students for practical training, have been appointed educational institutions, that is they have been given their share of responsibility for the education of the students. This decentralisation has developed in accordance with the general pattern of change within the public sector in Denmark and the rest of Scandinavia, where the New Public Management trend means, among other things, that public institutions are to work as "independent business operations", i.e. on the one hand they are to comply with a nationally determined target and framework whilst on the other hand they are to inform themselves of and legitimise themselves in relation to the local needs of their users.

However, what are the implications of this new training programme, including this new way of organising the training programme, for those pedagogues who qualify and enter the pedagogical employment market? How are they equipped for coping with the demands they are met with at the pedagogical workplaces? What are their attitudes to the working life they encounter, and what are their prospects for the future? I have tried to find the answers to such questions through qualitative interviews with 12 newly qualified pedagogues from three different training colleges in Denmark.

The complete findings of this study are published in Danish in the book "En helt anden virkelighed – 12 nye pædagoger om uddannelse og arbejde" ("An Entirely Different Reality - the experience of 12 newly qualified pedagogues on the subject of education and work"), EVU, April 1999. In the present context, I am going to restrict myself to giving a brief list of the empirical, methodological and



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theoretical basis for the study and subsequently I shall try to point out those issues that may be of general relevance on a discussion of the relationship between (a modernised) education and (a modern) labour market.

Finally I am going to discuss a couple of concepts that proved particularly interesting in the course of the study, i.e. the concepts of self-regulation, self-determination and self-administration. These concepts that were traditionally critical societal utopias appear to have been central concepts in the teaching in all three training colleges. The meaning of these concepts – the way in which they are interpreted by the newly qualified pedagogues – is, however, vastly different according to the given cultural context. These concepts may represent a wish for individual liberation from communal traditions, but they may also be seen as part of a humanistic rhetoric, the consequences of which it may be difficult to unambiguously define. This humanistic discourse may represent high ethical ideals, but is also currently part of an argument for (neo-) liberal deregulation and marketization of in the public sector in Denmark. That which is officially seen as democratising and humanising may in a critical perspective be seen as a demand for the individual "user" (i.e. the individual child or disabled person) to develop what Foucault describes as a new form for "technology of the self". That is that the individual will learn to administer oneself in such a way as to make the administration of that person easier for others, cf. the concept of "self care" which today is a central concept within the Danish health care and social services.

The ambiguous concepts may well be a contributing factor for the success of the involved actors and interested parties behind the composition of the new education for pedagogues to reach a compromise. However, the ambiguity also makes it more difficult for the newly qualified pedagogues to find their bearings in the pedagogical field and get a true sense of the proper characteristics of sound pedagogical practice.

## Empirical material, method, theories

As mentioned, the empirical material in the study consists of qualitative interviews with 12 newly qualified pedagogues from three different training colleges in three different locations in Denmark. The 12 pedagogues were selected according to the criteria that they should represent a mixture of sex, age and employment areas. There were two rounds of interviews: the first round consisted of individual interviews when the pedagogues had been qualified for approx. six

months, and the second round consisted of group interviews after they had been qualified for approx. one year. During the interviews I asked the pedagogues to tell me about their present working situation, about their past when they took part in the training programme, and about their future prospects on the pedagogical employment market. Thus this is not a representative study with a 'quantitative status', but rather a study that has hopefully succeeded in getting to the bottom of an issue through the use of a limited amount of material.

The analysis of the empirical material has primarily been through the means of discourse and text analysis. In other words, I have taken the information of the pedagogues literally, i.e. I have concentrated on discovering, directly through their own words, which themes they preoccupy themselves with, including the values and views of the world they put across, and the point of view they choose to employ in their narratives. Thus, it is exclusively the perspective of the newly qualified I have been able to discover by use of the methods chosen, and it could be advantageous to combine it with a study among the colleagues and users of the newly qualified pedagogues. Neither have I attempted to penetrate the intra-psychological or interpersonal aspects in my analysis of the interviews. Instead I have tried to stick to analysing the type of social practice that constitutes the practice of discourse. This analytic strategy has meant, for instance, that I have been able to publicise quotations and analyses from the interviews with the unconditional blessing of the interviewees.

The theoretical basis for my analyses comes from the analysis of discourse and culture and from theories on societal and cultural aspects of the modernisation process including, as previously mentioned, the particular politico-administrative changes within the Scandinavian welfare states known as "modernisation of the public sector" or New Public Management.

## Decentralisation means differentiation

The first point of general relevance from my study is hardly surprising to anyone. Namely, that if a national education board – even in such a small country as Denmark – leaves it to the decentralised levels to determine essential elements of the training programmes, it will result in differentiation. Or more to the point: when the central decision-making capacity is being toned down, the local regional, social and cultural differences will be – if not strengthened – then more apparent. For better or worse. It simply has to be this way. In my study this is seen in two ways. One is huge individual differences between the newly qualified





pedagogues. The other is noticeable differences between the newly qualified pedagogues from the three different training colleges.

The first thing that struck me when I interviewed the pedagogues was simply how different they all were. I am not merely referring to the differences that are natural between 12 different individuals, but to the fact that the training programme devised through the means of decentralised organisation and employing, for instance, project work and optional subjects, has offered the students the opportunity for maintaining and developing a number of special interests that, in the long term, they would like to integrate into their pedagogical work. This could be interests such as sports, music, movement, family and psycho therapy, particular disabilities, treatment of addiction, etc. The training programme has thus not only left room for "special individuals" but also for "individual specialisation".

The other thing that was immediately obvious during the study was the local differences. It was clearly evident that the pedagogues from any one training college had been able to reach a cultural consensus about the essence of pedagogical work. In my book I describe three different themes, "Love thy neighbour", "Know yourself" and "Communicate" that are characteristic for the "pedagogical ethos" put across by the newly qualified from each of the three training colleges. It is outside the scope of the present paper to thoroughly describe those three themes, but their roots in a Christian humanistic culture are clearly observable whilst, at the same time, – as I am able to show in my analyses – they are the results of interaction with important teachers and subjects at the training college in question as well as of challenges from and conformity to the local culture in the environment of the training college. To the newly qualified pedagogues the themes – for instance "Love thy neighbour" – function as a kind of ideal or instruction. On the one hand they sketch the profile of the newly qualified pedagogues' special mission in the pedagogical work, and on the other hand they are stepping stones for the pedagogues' criticism of the conditions of pedagogical work in public institutions. The themes, or rather the pedagogical convictions they represent, are thus extremely important to the newly qualified pedagogues, but – as may be imagined – they may turn into a two-edged sword when the newly qualified pedagogues find that they are unable to live up to their own ideals.

The decentralised planning of training programmes thus provides a fruitful diversity although the newly qualified pedagogues appear to be more specialised than the pedagogical employment market in Denmark. At any rate, most of them

will initially have to make do with employment that is more ordinary – and boring? – than they had hoped for. In addition, it is worth noting that the newly qualified pedagogues find it difficult to enter the employment market. Not because of the actual work with the children, juveniles or disabled, but because of their relationships with their colleagues. They find it difficult to be allowed to have any influence on the daily discussions and culture, and – compared with the positive situation from the training college – they are looking for more reflection, development and dialogue among the pedagogical staff. In this connection their pedagogical convictions are a strength, though it is a weakness that they are unable to share them with their colleagues.

In other words: the new training programme may be said to live up to the individualising resulting from the modern cultural situation. It is meaningful for the young people to be allowed to take responsibility for the planning of their education and to be able to choose their own specialisation according to their personal interests. However, the education could also be said to emphasise the individualisation in that, basically, it makes it more difficult for the newly qualified to find a common denominator and a shared understanding with their new colleagues. This is where the cultural processes in a given workplace becomes of utmost importance, and in this connection it is interesting to note how the newly qualified pedagogues use the psycho-pedagogical theory. They emphasise that they do not use it in an instructive sense, though this does not mean that it is unimportant. On the contrary, they use the theoretical framework for establishing meaning, importance and a sense of direction in what might otherwise be seen as a mindless grind in a field characterised by hard work and plenty of potential human conflicts, and consequently they are, as mentioned, looking for the opportunity to share their theoretical reflections with others.

## "Modernising" means new demands for qualifications

The second point of more general relevance that I came across in my study was the newly qualified pedagogues' search of what I would term increased proficiency in negotiation and administrative systems. As stated, it was not the directly pedagogical relations to children and other "users" that the pedagogues found difficult. They felt confident and competent about this. What they found difficult, was the relationship to their colleagues and – not least – other professional groups inside and outside the institutions such as for instance social workers from the departments of social security. Those newly qualified pedagogues that worked within special areas of social pedagogy in particular, felt





they were not adequately equipped to "legally represent" their clients in relation to the authorities. However, generally the new pedagogues were looking for more knowledge of economics, administration, public case work, political decision-making procedures in the municipal councils and counties, as well as greater skills in both written and oral communication with these bodies.

Presumably this is not a need for the newly qualified pedagogues only, but a general need for further education that is related to the changes within – and around – the pedagogical work; a need that has arisen as a result of the "modernisation process" of the public sector in Denmark. As the "modernisation process" advances, it will no longer be sufficient for pedagogues, teachers and nurses etc. to be good at their "core function", that is their relations to their users. It is becoming ever more important for them to be able to master a number of very different functions such as economic management, organisation/management, negotiations, marketing, etc in order to maintain the basis for running their public institutions – or organisations as they are now termed. Decentralisation, targeting and structural management means that public employees have to organise and negotiate on management boards and with public and private "customers". The new decentralisation of wages and working conditions means that any conflicts that were previously dealt with nationally, now has to be taken up with the management of each institution. Finally, the phasing out of the Scandinavian welfare states in preference to the idea of "the responsive government" means, as mentioned, that public institutions will no longer be able to legitimise themselves by referring to national guidelines, but will have to justify their practices through a "dialogue with their users".

In short: new demands or new challenges, depending on your temperament. At any rate, it means that the special psycho-pedagogical knowledge and that particular brand of "user-orientated" competence that up until now has been the core of pedagogical skills is no longer sufficient. Quite the contrary; it has to be supplemented by very different types of discourse or socially related practices – or the ability to find one's bearings and position in a quite different power struggle. "The efficient father" has to complement "the good mother". The question then remains, whether the two can get on together, or whether those are two areas that are so different from one another that the success of the one will cause the extinction of the other?

## Modern life means new career prospects

The third point, I find relevant in this context, is the plans for the future of "my" newly qualified pedagogues. Eleven out of 12 stressed that in the long term they did not see themselves in the same kind of pedagogical work as they have now. They would like to carry on with pedagogical work in some form or other, but they did not intend to stay put in "those daily routines on the floor of the kindergarten", where they presently found themselves.

When I inquired about their plans for the future, it transpired that in their different ways they all wanted to combine their pedagogical skills with their special interests and knowledge and thus to create their own special niche or a special career. A number of them were planning to supplement their education within the psychological and pedagogical field for instance by going to university, and one – the oldest participant of the study – had already embarked on further education within the area that held her particular interest. Others imagined that they would be able to combine their knowledge of or interest in e.g. sports, music or special forms of treatment, etc. with their pedagogical skills and thus create a special job, perhaps on a freelance basis, as a consultant or teacher. Generally, the newly qualified wanted jobs that held a continuous line of challenges, and they were not put off by the fact that this may include some addjtional or superior functions at, for instance, managerial level.

When the newly qualified pedagogues described their wishes or visions for the future, they did not subscribe to a pattern of life long positions with any one employer, but rather to a pattern of "sliding career ladders". Careers in which they regularly change jobs or job functions, not necessarily in order to advance "towards the top", but equally well in order to move "sideways" to a position that would better satisfy their need for an interesting and challenging job – or one that is simply different from their last job.

When I observed their actual "working life behaviour" it became clear that they were already busy preparing to move on. After one year, only two persons were still working in the same job they had begun straight after their exam, and in which they planned to stay on for a period. Obviously, many of the newly qualified pedagogues had been employed in relief or temporary positions, but eight out of 12 had been active themselves with regard to moving on. They did not see the change of job as a negative experience, on the contrary the changes appeared to match their plans for the future and their perception of working life: you make an effort for a certain period during which you learn to master the job,





and then it is finished. Hopefully, you have then obtained a better position from which you can advance to something else with new challenges.

If I have to try and explain this "new attitude towards career" there are several possibilities. One might be that we are dealing with a generation of ambitious and rootless young people, who find it difficult to accept an ordinary everyday life with the demands that go with paid work. Another – perhaps more reasonable – possibility could be that to change one's job – or to intend to do so – could be seen as an attempt to avoid the ambivalence entailed in pedagogical work. Viewed in this light, the wishes for the future of the newly qualified pedagogues could be seen as a voice of criticism; not of the pedagogical work as such, but of the conditions under which it has to be carried out.

The newly qualified pedagogues themselves, however, explain their wishes for the future as a manifestation of a general cultural trend. As a manifestation that they are part of a modern culture whereby they, as individuals, make demands to themselves and to having a good life:

> *No, I believe it has more to do with our generation. We are kind of more individualistic. We want something from our lives.*
>
> Anja, West, June 1998

How those 12 pedagogues will be getting on in future, I do not know. It will depend on themselves, but it will also depend on the developments of the pedagogical employment market in Denmark – and on the international development in general. New flexible employment situations and a permanently dynamic employment market may result in a greater freedom of choice, but it could also entail the risk of becoming casual workers with only limited wages and influence. But then, this is really a matter for the trade unions.

## Self-determination and self-administration

Conclusively I will, as previously stated, make a few comments about the various interpretations that have apparently been attached to the "critical/utopian" concepts of self-regulation, self-determination and self-administration in connection with the new Danish education programme for pedagogues. As a starting point I have no reason to suspect that the teachers should not use the concepts very differently from the traditional manners within the fields of critical psychology or critical theory, but in the case of the newly qualified pedagogues it is

very different situation. For a start, the interviews clearly reveal that the socio-critical and politco-utopian perspectives are played down in order to give room for more practical and activity related interpretations which in turn place the responsibility for realising the concepts with the individual pedagogue. Secondly, it becomes obvious that the concepts may be interpreted very differently indeed according to the given cultural context pertaining to the newly qualified pedagogue.

To the newly qualified pedagogues from the west college – which is situated in the least modernised area of the study, and where the surrounding culture is (still) to a large extent characterised by a communal set of norms, a communal moral for better or worse – self-regulation, self-determination and self-administration mean, by and large, liberation. Freedom, self-confidence, self-expression and the realisation of the individual! This is how the newly qualified pedagogues interpret the concepts, and this is what they want for their clients and for themselves. They make a huge effort to penetrate traditional views of what children and disabled are and are not able to, what they should and should not, and they are aiming for openness, freedom and tolerance. On their own behalves they also want liberation. They want a "modern life", one which they form themselves without being tied down by traditional patterns and lifestyles, and when they choose the education to become a pedagogue, this is one part of their life project. Nevertheless, it is also clear that this picture of liberation is based on a more traditional set of norms. Working morals, responsibility and conscience are still vivid concepts with them, and one of the four is very direct in her criticism of what she perceives as a "permanent demand for development" in modern society, and a demand that she sees as being fraught with problems for children and adults alike:

> *"Nowadays we're saying that this is a springboard , and that we need constant challenge. I would like to say this again: I do believe it is dangerous. This current trend that things have to happen all the time, and we have to be on the go all the time, and there has to be challenge and development. Those are also the very things we are pacing our children towards today. "You have to develop, and what (leisure time) activities can you pursue? ". I believe that in our roles as pedagogues we should learn to a far greater degree also to be able to stand still from time to time, and to be able to cope with not having to learn something new all the time."*
>
> Sofie, West, June 1998





The world looks very different to the newly qualified pedagogues from the east college, and to them the concepts have a different meaning. The east college is situated in a suburb to the Danish Capital City, i.e. in the societal and culturally most modernised part of the country, and the newly qualified pedagogues from the east appear to take it for granted to live an individualised life, where one is primarily responsible for one's own life – and refer to oneself only – and where opportunities are vast and not restricted by set models. To them "administrating oneself" is not a life project nor Utopia, but rather a condition of life. This does not mean, however, that the concepts of self-regulation, self-determination and self-administration have no meaning to the pedagogues from the east. They do. The East-pedagogues are, in particular, very concerned with the concept of self-determination and the criticism of power it may be seen to contain. However, they also express a huge sense of confusion. How do you, in actual fact, interpret this concept? In the cultural context where they find themselves, there are no unambiguous definitions. Ethical ideals clash with practical reality for the newly qualified pedagogues, and makes it hard for them to find their proper place within the pedagogical world:

For instance a pedagogue may not be "adult authoritative" in relation to children. That is an ideal the newly qualified pedagogues have learnt at college. But what does this entail in real life? May the pedagogue impose limits for children? May the pedagogue express his/her own emotions and personal limits in the company of children, juveniles and physically/mentally/socially disadvantaged clients? May the pedagogue offer help without first having been asked by the client? Etc., etc. Such questions would always be relevant for people of authority in a care function to contemplate, but they become especially difficult to answer when they are being raised in the late modern Denmark in relation to the actual modernisation discourse. The "'self-concepts" has since 1984 been very popular words in the liberal attempts to push back state responsibilities to the civile sociey - or to the marked, and they have been adopted by many leading members of the Danish Social Democratic Party as well.

One result has been the New Danish Service Law of 1997. In this law the concept of social legislation in Denmark has been officially replaced by legislation on the services that counties and municipal councils offer the citizens. Thus the formal role of the pedagogues is no longer to represent "public common sense", i.e. the communal idea of what is best for children/juveniles/disabled etc. The role of the pedagogues is to come up with an offer of services that the users may choose to accept or decline. This is a change that could be viewed as an obvious civilising progress if it were not for the fact that it is closely bound up with current and

intense politico-administrative negotiations or power struggles about to regulate and finance the relations between the providers of (public) services and the users.

Anyone would agree that the "user" themselves should determine their needs and personally administrate the meeting of their needs, but the financial preconditions are on the agenda too. In the radical scenario the "pedagogical services" will turn into commodities like any other on the market, and the users will become consumers who buy what they want and can afford. Hence the pedagogues acquire a new role as service workers who deliver the goods they are being paid for, and children/clients/consumers will have to face a different kind of selection, based on their personal social and financial ressources. In this context the word "self" develops a new meaning. If children in the kindergarten are able to regulate their needs in relation to food, sleep, friends, etc. "themselves", it is easier for the pedagogues, and if the disabled and the elderly can live "by themselves" in their own homes, it is cheaper for the counties and municipal councils. To the less well-off "the pedagogics of self-determination" may become pedagogics of "mind-your-own-affairs", in other words a demand for them to be solely responsible for internal as external conditions that they have no way of ever influencing themselves. Put in a somewhat old-fashioned rhetoric they are given the responsibility for "administrating their own suppression", or to use Foucault's concepts they are given responsibility for establishing a "technology of the self" that enables easy "control" of them. A selection and suppression quite opposite the social ideals and humanistic etics the pedagogues are brought up with in college.

Thus it is hardly surprising that the new pedagogues are confused as to what is really meant by the "self-concepts".

On the other hand one may assume that the very ambiguity of the concepts have helped to enable the consensus or the compromises necessary for establishing the new Danish educational programme for pedagogues. There are such different ways to interpret the concepts that the national politicians, the employers in the counties and municipal councils, the pedagogues in the trade unions and the teachers at the training colleges presumably have been able to adopt an interpretation that has suited their purposes. Be it a neo-liberal, a humanistic-idealistic, or a critical utopian interpretation – or perhaps just a pragmatic functionalistic one.





At the same time, however, it explains why it is presently not possible to define the concepts from the pedagogical education programme in a more precise manner.

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